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ABSTRACT

The High School and Family Partnership Project began in 1991 with two urban, two suburban, and two rural high schools in Maryland to learn more about whether basic theories, frameworks, and practices of family, student, and community involvement are appropriate at the high school level; how schools can develop and implement such practices; and how partnerships affect the students, families, teachers, and communities involved. This report is the first in a series on these high schools as they work to develop and improve their partnerships with students, families, and communities. It explores where schools start in their thinking about partnerships. The starting point is called a "trust fund" to recognize that each school's past practices can be built upon to create further partnerships, and also to recognize that trust among the participants is a primary condition for developing successful practices of partnership over time. This report describes the "trust funds" of the six schools, combining existing practices and ideas for new implementations. The activities are categorized according to a framework of six types of involvement that will help these and other high schools plan and monitor the development of more comprehensive programs of partnership. One table summarizes trust fund contents. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/SLD)

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School, Family, and Community Partnerships in High Schools

Joyce L. Epstein
Lori J. Connors

Report No. 24 / August 1994

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

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Abstract

Although real advances have been made in understanding and developing school and family partnerships in preschool and elementary grades, and some progress has been made in the middle grades, little attention has been given to family involvement in high schools. In 1991 we began the High School and Family Partnership Project with two urban, two suburban, and two rural high schools in Maryland to learn more about whether basic theories, frameworks, and practices of involvement are appropriate at the high school level; how schools can develop and implement such practices; and how partnerships affect the students, families, teachers, and communities involved.

This report is the first in a series on these high schools as they work to develop and improve their partnerships with students, families, and communities. We look at where the schools are starting from in their thinking about partnerships. We call the starting point a "trust fund" to recognize that each school's past practices can be built upon to create further partnerships, and also to recognize that trust among the participants is a primary condition for developing successful practices of partnership over time.

This report describes the high schools' trust funds, combining existing practices and ideas for new implementations. The activities are categorized according to a framework of six types of involvement that will help these and other high schools plan and monitor the development of more comprehensive programs of partnership.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to our school partners in this project for their ideas for this report and for their willingness to work to improve practices of school-family-community partnership. They are (alphabetically by school):

Chesapeake High School -- Nikki Coffman, Sue Hanson, David Kehne, and Fred Prumo
Douglass High School -- Yvonne Hamilton and Shirley Hill
Edgewood High School -- Dave Myers, Claudia Sconion, and Robert Williams
Havre de Grace High School -- Catherine Hepler, Carolyn Kustanbauter, Robin Walter, and Ronald Webb
Kenwood High School -- Vicki Bender, Harold Hatton, and Sharon Shultz
Patterson High School -- Rose Douglas, Frank Thomas, and Olivia Williams

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The authors share equal responsibility for this report, and either may be contacted for more information.

Introduction

At all grade levels, efforts to improve family, school, and community partnerships require new ways of thinking about the simultaneous influences on children's learning and development. Changes in thinking, or "paradigm shifts" (Barker, 1988; Finn, 1990; Kuhn, 1970) are difficult to accomplish at any level of schooling, but will be particularly challenging for teachers, administrators, parents, and students in high schools for several reasons.

Most high school teachers define themselves as subject matter specialists; few give attention to the "whole child." Few teachers and administrators have had education or special training to prepare them for working with families in positive ways. High schools are larger and more complex organizations than elementary or middle schools. Teachers have large numbers of students, and few work closely with their students' other teachers. Most high school teachers, counselors, and administrators have little experience communicating general information on school programs and students' options to large numbers of families, focusing instead on crisis interventions with a few families when students have serious academic or behavioral problems.

Most parents have not been guided continuously by their children's schools to remain involved in their children's education from year to year. By the time their teens enter high school, gaps in knowledge and relationships have developed that make many parents less likely to initiate contact with high school teachers, administrators, or counselors. Parents continue to have questions, however, about adolescent development, school programs, courses, their teens' progress, success in school, future plans, and how they can continue to support the school and their children's learning.

Most students at the high school level are increasing their independence and sense of responsibility. They may make demands on teachers and parents for greater control over their school life and work, and families and teachers may purposely limit their own interactions in order to encourage teens' independence. However, adolescents continue to need the guidance and strong support of adults -- family members, teachers, coaches, and others -- in order to gradually assume more adult roles and responsibilities.

Despite these challenges, the prospects for improving partnerships at the high school level are good. Increasingly, high school administrators, program developers, counselors,

and teachers are asking for proven processes, ideas, and materials to help them assess and develop better connections with families and communities. Increasingly, business and community groups are expressing interest in their local schools and students. Parents of teens are worried about their teens and their futures, and recognize the need for better connections with the high schools their children attend. To date, however, little is available to guide the work of high school educators.

Studies of high school students' home environments conducted from the 1960s (Coleman et al., 1966) through the 1970s (McDill & Rigsby, 1973; Epstein & McPartland, 1979) to the 1980s (Bauch, 1988; Clark, 1983; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Keith, 1982; Keith & associates, 1986; Muller, 1991) show that some parents, on their own, remain involved in their children's education through high school, and that students of involved parents tend to do better in school. Other research documents the dramatic decline in involvement at the high school level (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein 1986; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), in part because of the reasons outlined above, and in part because there has been no concerted effort to translate and apply research results to develop processes for partnerships in high schools that benefit students, assist parents, and strengthen schools. The goal of this study is to work with schools to gather data about family involvement from their own teachers, parents, and students, and to use the data as the basis for developing and implementing plans for better programs of partnership.

Description of the Project

In 1991 we began to work with two urban, two suburban, and two rural high schools in Maryland to learn more about how to think about and organize school, family, and community partnerships. The high schools range in size from about 500 to over 1200 students, of whom 20% to 100% are from racial minority groups, and 15% to over 60% are from low-income families. The six high schools participate in the Maryland's Tomorrow program, a dropout prevention program that provides students who meet certain at-risk criteria with extra guidance and counseling services. Six other high schools that also participate in the Maryland's Tomorrow program serve as comparison sites, with similar student populations based on student achievement, attendance, and other basic statistics that are collected in all Maryland high schools.

Maryland's Tomorrow schools provide extra services to help selected students who are at risk of school failure. In addition to counseling services, all of the programs offer these students incentives for good attendance and provide enrichment and educational trips. Although family involvement has been on their agenda for school improvement, these high schools -- like others in Maryland and elsewhere -- are still struggling to understand *how* to organize and implement new practices to increase the quantity and quality of contacts with the families of Maryland's Tomorrow students and all other students' families. Thus, the comparison sites start with the same agenda about partnership, but the high schools in the project are being guided to expand their programs to inform and involve families and community members incrementally over three years.

This project is purposely collaborative. The schools have joined researchers in an effort to identify what parent-school-community partnerships are appropriate at the high school level, how schools can develop and implement such practices, and how the practices affect the students, parents, and teachers involved. We start with the belief that researchers and educators *share the role of expert* as they work together to improve schools (Epstein, 1986a; Epstein, Herrick, & Coates, in press), and both benefit from this association.

Schools benefit from researchers' support and assistance in applying a research-based framework to develop their programs and practices of partnership. In this project, connections with researchers also provide educators with small grants to support planning time, meetings, and related design and implementation work. Researchers benefit from the connections with the real world of high school teachers, parents, and students. Connections with educators provide researchers with a close and continuing view of the partnership practices that are feasible in diverse schools and classrooms.

In short, researchers and educators can learn and do more together than either could alone about developing, implementing, studying, and reporting school, family, and community partnerships.

Project Questions and Goals

Key questions of school, family, and community partnerships are addressed by this project:

- How can high schools organize and conduct partnerships with families and with community groups that will benefit students?
- Which practices of partnership will *help more students* feel supported by their families, schools and community? Will particular practices of partnership assist students to succeed in school; take advanced courses; develop positive attitudes toward learning; graduate from high school on time; plan for the future; and reach other desired behaviors?
- Which practices of partnership will *help more families* feel supported by the schools, maintain their influence in their children's education and lives, and increase positive and productive communications with their teens and teachers?
- Which practices of partnership will *help more schools* and teachers feel supported by the families and the communities they serve, and increase positive and productive communications with students, families, and groups and individuals in the community?
- How are partnerships at the high school level similar to and different from those in the elementary and middle grades?

To address the key questions, the school leaders and researchers set these common goals and guidelines:

- **Follow a research-based theory and framework.** The researchers and educators agreed to test the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that school, family, and community organizations are more effective when they share responsibility for children's learning and development (Epstein, 1987). Organizations can purposely increase or decrease practices of partnership among their members. The question is, which practices encourage families, schools, and communities to work together to help high school students succeed, to strengthen families, and to improve school programs and teachers' effectiveness?

- **Build a comprehensive program of practices to include the Six Major Types of Involvement.** The framework guiding the development of

partnerships has emerged from studies conducted in the elementary and middle grades. In short form (Epstein, 1992) the types of involvement are:

Type 1: Parenting -- Assisting families with basic obligations of parenting skills and setting home conditions for learning at each age and grade level;

Type 2: Communicating -- Increasing the effectiveness of the school's basic obligations to communicate clearly about school programs and children's progress through school-to-home and home-to-school communications;

Type 3: Volunteering -- Improving the organization, work, and schedules of volunteers and audiences to involve families at the school or in other locations to support the school and students;

Type 4: Learning at Home -- Involving families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions;

Type 5: Decision Making -- Including families in decision making, governance, and advocacy; and

Type 6: Collaborating with Community -- Coordinating the work and resources of community businesses, agencies, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

This framework needs to be tested at the high school level to identify which of hundreds of possible practices for each type are appropriate, feasible, and useful at this level (Epstein & Connors, 1992; Connors & Epstein, 1994). The high schools in this project will identify and implement practices for all six types of involvement.

- **Establish an Action Team for School and Family Partnerships.** At each school, this team includes teachers, parents, and students, and may include administrators and community members to plan and conduct the project with the project leader and the researchers.

- **Explore new ideas to involve all families across the high school grades.** This includes taking stock of present practices, learning about new ones, and sharing ideas, progress, and problems with each other.

- **Start with the transition year.** Each school agreed to begin by emphasizing and improving practices to inform and involve the families of incoming ninth graders; then, to emphasize practices that focus on at least one new grade level in each succeeding year of the project.

The schools recognized the importance of reaching students and their families at the point of transition from the middle grades to high school. The transition year -- grade 9 in these schools -- is important for initiating good contacts with families who are new to the school; then it is easier to continue appropriate communications and interactions as the students proceed through the high school grades. This emphasis can occur even if the schools conduct some school-wide communications with families of students at all grade levels.

Research shows that schools that involve families in the transition from the elementary to middle grades are more likely to continue involving families through the middle grades (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). The same pattern is likely to occur in high schools. If communications during the transition process and initial year are missed, many families lose touch with their teens' schools. If high schools set a tone for partnership at the time of transition and continue appropriate practices across the grades, more families are likely to remain informed and involved with their teens and the schools.

- **Use the summer to plan the activities for the next school year.** The educators and researchers recognize the importance of preparing new practices so that they start at the beginning of each school year. The schools' small grants support time during the summer to design the activities that will be added to the program each fall.

- **Study and share successful efforts, problems, and solutions.** The educators and researchers collect information, evaluate efforts, and report results and implications to each other and to other researchers and educators. The Action Teams of all project schools meet in the spring of each year to review their work, share successes, discuss problems, and plan ahead. The Action Teams consider new ideas and develop their next two-year plans to continue to improve their programs of partnership.

Structures to Meet the Goals

To meet the goals, the researchers and educators identified key structures to support work on the project in the schools. These structures include leadership, action teams, financial support, activities to document progress, and new collaborations.

Leadership for an Action Team for School and Family Partnerships. The school-site leadership for this project is provided by a school-site facilitator, often in the Maryland's Tomorrow program. The participation of a salaried school staff member (a designated teacher, counselor, or administrator) as a leader for guiding and overseeing actions in a program of family and community connections represents a level of commitment that could be matched by any high school that wants to develop and improve its partnerships.

Action Team for School and Family Partnerships. An Action Team is responsible for action and for making progress on all six types of involvement. A team should include *at least* three teachers from different grade or subject areas, three parents of students at different grade levels, an administrator, counselor, or other professional(s) with interests in families, and two students from different grade levels. The Action Team is responsible for identifying or gathering ideas, taking action, and linking to the researchers and other teams in the project.

The school-site facilitator is the leader of the Action Team, or a pair may be named co-leaders of the team. Action Team members are assigned to chair or co-chair a subcommittee for action on one of the six main types of partnership in the framework that guides the development of the program.

The success of the Action Team depends on the delegation of responsibilities. As the Team selects its chairs and co-chairs of the committees for accomplishing improvements on each of the six types of involvement, it must gauge who is best suited to provide leadership for particular partnerships. For example, at the high school level, an administrator and parent, or parent and counselor, might be best suited to co-chair the Type 1 subcommittee. They might design and conduct a series of discussions on adolescent development with outside experts and with students, and summarize the information for families who cannot come to the meeting at school. By contrast, a teacher and counselor, or teacher and student, might co-chair the Type 4 subcommittee. They might engage other teachers to

design interactive homework assignments that require students to interview or discuss important topics, decisions, or goals with a parent, or with other family and community members.

The assignment of chairs and co-chairs to the subcommittees on types should take into account the varied talents and perspectives of the leaders and their abilities to recruit other teachers, parents, students, or community members who are needed to accomplish the *actions* for improving each type of involvement.

Financial support. The schools in the project receive a small stipend of up to $1000 each year to support the work of the Action Team. Funds may be used to pay for substitute teachers to give Team members time to work together, for stipends for teachers or parents to attend Team meetings in the summer or on weekends, or for other program requirements. This level of support is within the means of any school or district that wishes to improve its program of partnership.

Activities to Document Progress

Researchers and educators also agreed on several methods of data collection to identify, analyze, and report the schools' starting points, plans, and progress in developing their programs. These include:

Initial interviews. The high schools began their work at a workshop with researchers by sharing information on these questions: Where are the schools starting from? What practices of partnership do high schools presently conduct with incoming ninth graders and their families? How well do they reach all families? What practices could be improved or added immediately?

Survey data. Representatives from each high school met with the researchers to help design surveys to obtain information from their own teachers, parents, and students about present and desired practices of partnership (Epstein, Connors, & Salinas, 1993). All of the schools administered the surveys to obtain an overview of their practices and needs. Each school was given a summary of the survey data prepared by the researchers addressing such questions as: What practices do teachers, parents, and students believe are presently strong, need to improve, or need to be added to the school program to create more

responsive partnerships? The schools used their summaries to develop multi-year plans for expanding and improving practices of partnership (Connors & Epstein, 1994)

The data from teachers, parents, and students across schools will be analyzed in future reports to better understand the nature and extent of family and school partnerships at the high school level.

Evaluations of specific practices. As each school adds or improves partnership activities, the educators and researchers will document their work. We will conduct short surveys or interviews to address such questions as: How well is a new practice organized, implemented, and improved? Which families are reached and which are not reached? What problems are created and how can they be solved so that families, students, and teachers communicate effectively? What are the results for students, families, and schools of selected well-implemented practices? What changes in attitudes, behaviors, and interactions of students, families, and educators occur from investments in partnership activities? How do students' roles develop and contribute to school and family partnerships? Selected practices will be documented to determine: Are new practices of partnership transferable from one high school to another? Are the structures for leadership, action teams, and financial support for the project realistic for achieving the project goals, and for guiding the work of other high schools?

Taken together, the methods of data collection and documentation will help to inform each of the project schools and other high schools about improving partnerships with families and communities.

Starting Points in High School Partnerships

While survey data were being processed, analyzed, and reported for each school, researchers and Action Teams met to identify each high school's *present practices* to involve families that were used in the prior school year (1991-92). Based on their present practices, they also outlined *short-term, one-year action plans* for new or improved practices for the 1992-93 school year, particularly to inform and involve the incoming ninth grade students and their families. This report describes the "trust fund" on which each school will build a *long-term, multi-year plan* based on their survey data from teachers, parents, and students (Connors & Epstein, 1994). In the next section, we describe the six high schools that

initiated this project, and summarize the strength of their trust funds -- the practices and ideas with which they are starting to build their programs of partnership.

The High Schools

Chesapeake High School

About the school. Chesapeake High School serves the largest number of low-income families (students receiving free or reduced lunch) in Baltimore County -- nearly twice as many as the school with the next highest number. The suburban school, serving about 800 students, is about 82% white and 18% African American. Nearly one fourth of the students are chronically absent from school, missing more than 20 days per year. Compared to other schools in the district, Chesapeake has a high mobility rate, high dropout rate, high drug use among students, and a high rate of teen parenthood.

Despite economic, social, and academic problems, over 96% of the students at Chesapeake pass the state's required functional tests by the eleventh grade in reading, math, and writing. The school still falls behind other county schools, most of which have 98%-100% passing rates on these tests. Chesapeake has set goals to improve its passing rate on the citizenship functional test, and student attendance, graduation rates, readiness for college or work, and achievement on academic tests that go beyond basic skills.

Chesapeake has a positive attitude about its programs, students, and families. All of the teachers in the school take their turns at different "duties," indicating a shared investment in the climate of the school beyond their work in the classroom. The teachers and administrators on the Action Team for School and Family Partnerships share a commitment to improve their programs for all students and to increase communications with families.

Chesapeake's trust fund for partnerships. Chesapeake High School has a relatively strong "trust fund" of communications with families on which to build a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships. The school has a number of practices already in place, and is particularly strong on Type 2 communications about school programs and children's progress. Most of the communications, however, do not systematically reach all families, and not all teachers at all grade levels communicate with families. The school conducts several practices to ease the students' transition to high

school and to help them succeed in their freshman year. Some of these activities involve families; others do not, but could with minor changes. Practices for most other types of involvement are weaker, and involve few families. The trust fund, however, should facilitate this school's progress in building a stronger program of partnership.

The Team's short-term plans for this project are to make better connections with all incoming ninth graders and their families; improve Back-To-School night for all families, provide information to all families, including those who are new to school, throughout the school year; and increase positive communications with families about their teens.

Douglass High School

About the school. Douglass High School is a large, inner-city school of nearly 1500 students. Many students have academic, attendance, and other problems, and many families are experiencing economic distress. The high school, with nearly 100% African American students, serves the highest number of low-income families in Baltimore City. In 1992, Douglass students met state standards for satisfactory progress in writing, but its scores on the functional tests of reading, math, and citizenship were among the lowest in the city and state. The school will need to work very hard to improve its program to help students improve their basic skills. There is a low attendance rate, with nearly 75% of the students chronically absent (20 or more days per year). The dropout rate per year is very high. There is high drug use among students and in the community, and high numbers of teen parents. None (0%) of the school's students are recognized as college or work ready, according to standard criteria for admission to the state colleges or completion of occupational training programs.

Douglass' trust fund for partnerships. The Maryland's Tomorrow dropout prevention program is called "Futures" in Douglass and in other city high schools. A program leader and a mental health professional coordinate services for Futures students and coordinate contacts with their families. The program provides eight Futures Advocates in Douglass who work with about 35 students each. The personal attention in Futures is much stronger than the attention given to other students in this large high school.

At the start of this project, the Futures staff reviewed its practices that recognize the importance of families. Few of its efforts reached all families, and many families -- including

Futures families -- had many needs for information that were not being met. As the Action Team works to expand the number and types of practices to involve the families of students in the Futures program, it also will work toward the goal of expanding good practices of partnerships with families schoolwide.

Two of Douglass' initial plans look promising. One idea is to codify the Futures program's personal approaches to families in one-page flyers on parenting and adolescent development for use by other parents, teachers, or counselors in the school. Another promising feature is to strengthen the activities of the School Improvement Team, which gives a few parents real leadership roles in advising the principal and in working with teachers on school policies.

Although some contacts are made with families of students in the Futures program, even these are at their earliest stages. There are few practices for each of the six types of involvement, and those that exist inform and involve very few parents. A more comprehensive program should emerge from suggestions in the survey data from Douglass' teachers, parents, and students.

**NOTE: After the first year of work with this project, Douglass experienced a series of staff changes and community events that elevated the fear of violence at the school. The Maryland's Tomorrow program leader was removed and not replaced. The school's history of low test scores prompted a threat of a state takeover of the school. The principal was removed and a new leader installed. The high school is in a period of planning new directions, and is on hold as a participant in the High School and Family Partnership Project while its organization and leadership are determined.*

Edgewood High School

About the school. Edgewood High School serves about 900 students from diverse communities, including rural areas and a military base in Harford County. About 15% of the students are from low-income families who qualify for free or reduced lunch. There is high mobility as families move in and out of the community. Over 30% of Edgewood's students are chronically absent (20 or more days a year). This reduces the overall average attendance to 88%, well below the 94% required to meet satisfactory levels set by the state. In 1992, 72% of Edgewood's students passed the state functional math test by the eleventh grade, nearly 85% passed writing and citizenship tests; and 93% passed the

functional reading test. At least 97% of the students must pass these tests for the school to meet the satisfactory level of standards set by the state.

Edgewood's trust fund for partnerships. Edgewood has a small trust fund on which to build a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships. At the start of the project, the Action Team reported: Few families visit during American Education Week (Type 2); a county-wide seminar on financial aid for post-secondary education is publicized, but few families attend (Type 2); the guidance office aims to coordinate volunteers, but few families volunteer or know that they can (Type 3); few parents go on field trips as chaperones (Type 3); the school has a PTSA, but it is not very active (Type 5); several practices concerning connections with the community could be expanded to involve families (Type 6).

Edgewood's short-term plans for this project are to improve or add ways to reach families early in the school year to convey the message that families are important to the high school and to their teens. They plan to conduct some traditional practices such as holding Back-to-School Night and publishing newsletters. They also aim to establish connections with families that are particularly appropriate for high school students and their futures, such as involving families in students' course choices, recruiting parent and community volunteers who can share information on their jobs, and developing information to bring families into students' planning for college or work.

Havre De Grace

About the school. Havre de Grace High School serves about 550 students, and has the largest number of low-income families in rural and suburban communities in Harford County. Over one fourth of the students are chronically absent (more than 20 days a year). The annual dropout rate is the county's highest, and scores are the county's lowest on three of the four required functional tests. The school aims to improve its test scores to meet the state's criteria for satisfactory levels of percent passing.

There seem to be two schools within Havre de Grace High. One large group of students is not achieving well at the school, and another group of students is successful in high school and goes on to college. The diversity of students and the mix of income levels

of families create challenges for the school and for the Action Team for School and Family Partnerships as they work to reach more families to help more students succeed.

Havre de Grace's trust fund for partnerships. Havre de Grace presently has a limited trust fund for school, family, and community partnerships, with only a few practices in place to involve all families in their teen's education.

The Action Team for School and Family Partnerships believes that its short-term plan to add and improve activities will increase communications and contacts with parents and improve student attendance and achievement. Initial activities at the start of this project have already created more parent attendance at some school activities, more friendly relations between some parents and teachers, earlier interventions by guidance counselors because contacts with parents were established in positive ways, more parent volunteers, and greater parent support for school programs.

The Havre de Grace Action Team made plans to improve the Back-to-School Night by adding linked activities -- a special meeting for incoming ninth graders and their families *before* the Back-to-School Night, and a plan for follow-up contacts *after* the Back-to-School Night. New directions also include inviting parents to assemblies that recognize students' achievements.

Kenwood High School

About the school. Kenwood High School serves nearly 1300 students, with a relatively low number of low-income families (17%) in suburban Baltimore County. The school has students in honors programs and students who are struggling in school. There is a high dropout rate, and a high rate (over 25%) of chronically absent students (more than 20 days per year). The school reached satisfactory or excellent levels of performance on all of the state functional tests, but does not reach state standards for attendance. Despite satisfactory basic skills, only a small percent of students were considered "college ready" (22%) or "work ready" (19%) in the 1991-92 school year. A typical graduating class consists of about 45% of the original ninth grade class. Though some students graduate from other high schools, the dropout rate is startling.

Despite its attainment of state standards for basic skills, Kenwood has serious problems due to high mobility of its families, students not living at home, drug and alcohol abuse, and lack of family supervision of children. The teachers estimate that as many as 20% of juniors and seniors live away from home. Many of them drive, support themselves with part-time jobs, pay for their own car insurance and other items, and are mainly independent. Even among freshmen and sophomores, the teachers estimate about 5% may live outside their family home, and many who live at home are mainly independent.

Kenwood's trust fund for partnerships. The Action Team members and the school's principal had a high level of awareness of the importance of improving communications with families, and had surveyed parents at least once before this project began. This high school starts with a relatively strong and diverse trust fund of communications with families (Type 2 activities), and has several innovative short-term plans to increase connections with more families, starting with the incoming ninth graders.

The Action Team aims to improve practices for all six types of involvement, including a mix of fairly traditional events (such as a better Back-To-School Night) and more innovative ideas (such as including families in students' goal setting and goal monitoring activities). Other improvements include providing better information to families about postsecondary planning, providing better health services for students, and highlighting successful alumni.

Patterson High School

About the school. Patterson High School is a large school of about 2400 students in Baltimore City that serves a low-income community. About 40% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. In 1992, students passed the state's functional reading test at a satisfactory level, but not the tests in math, writing, or citizenship. Over 60% of the students are chronically absent (more than 20 days a year). Many drop out before graduation. Few (less than 10%) are prepared to go to college.

The Maryland's Tomorrow program is called "Futures" in Patterson, as it is at Douglass and in other city high schools. At Patterson, students in 9th and 10th grades in the program have a Futures class one period each day in which they receive support and

guidance. In all grades, Futures students are assigned an Advocate who contacts the students' families at least twice a month.

The staff of the Futures program is generally optimistic about its chances to help students succeed at Patterson. The program receives extra resources for staff and for innovative programs for its students. Compared to similar students at risk of failure in the school, Futures students have good and continuous guidance.

Patterson, like Douglass, is two-to-three times the size of the suburban and rural schools in the project. The Action Team will begin its work to improve partnerships with families of students in the Futures program. Over time, the Team will work with the principal and school improvement committee to extend practices that appear successful with Futures students to all students and families.

Patterson's trust fund for partnerships. The Futures staff members who form the core of the project's Action Team have been leaders in the school in recognizing the importance of improving school and family partnerships. Their efforts, however, have been modest, mostly crisis oriented, and not always successful.

The Action Team described their present practices and how they will work to establish a stronger "trust fund" at Patterson for school and family partnerships, focusing particularly on incoming ninth graders and their families during the first year of the project. One idea is to make the shared responsibilities of school, student, and family explicit through parent, student, and staff pledges to each other to help students succeed. The Action Team also set serious short-term plans to guide more students into higher level math classes and improve student and family information about course choices and placements.

The plans of Patterson's Futures program are appropriate and important for all families. For example, friendly, informative letters at the start of each school year, easy access to their children's teachers and counselors, and involvement in course choices that affect students' futures are similar to the school-wide practices that other high schools in the project will be conducting. The difference is that at Patterson, only the Futures program has put family involvement on the agenda for school improvement, and directed staff members to make connections with families. The teachers with Futures students have a common free period to meet as a team, discuss student progress, meet with students or parents, and design special activities.

High Schools' Practices and Ideas for The Six Major Types of Involvement

This section catalogues the practices that the high schools identified in their short-term plans for the six major types of involvement in the framework that is guiding their work. Other urban, suburban, and rural high schools may find the framework and suggested practices helpful in two ways. First, any high school can assess where it is starting from on the six types of involvement by reviewing its present practices using the framework as a guide, or by comparing its work with the practices described here, or by administering the same questionnaires as these high schools. Second, any high schools can establish an Action Team for School and Family Partnerships to plan, implement, and improve practices for each of the six types of involvement.

This catalogue of practices does not represent the only or the best practices for each type of involvement, but provides a set of illustrative practices for each of the six types. Some of the practices had already been implemented by the project schools with at least some families. Or, the practices were viewed as feasible and important to add at the start of this project. Over the next two years the project schools will add, change, and improve these or other practices, based on surveys of teachers, parents, and students.

The following activities and plans form the "trust funds" of the project schools for their partnerships with families and communities. The initials in parentheses at the end of the entries and the table in Appendix A identify the high schools that suggested these practices.

TYPE 1: Assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, understanding adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning.

The high schools provided some experiences and ideas for home visits, referrals for special services, family support activities, information for parents about adolescents, and parenting skills for teen parents.

Home visits. Maryland's Tomorrow staff conduct home visits to meet with parents of incoming ninth graders, and at various times over the years that students are in the program. In addition to home visits, other special services for families of Maryland's Tomorrow students include Family Therapy sessions for families who need professional assistance to maintain positive family relations. (K)

Contacts are maintained with families of students in the Maryland's Tomorrow program as needed, through phone calls and, on some occasions, by driving students home after school. The Maryland's Tomorrow staff works with the pupil personnel staff to reach out to parents when students have special needs or problems. This program will require one home visit per family per year. (H)

Advocates conduct home visits to provide the families of Futures students with information about programs, students' schedules, the Advocate's room and school phone number, and sometimes, home phone number, so that families know they are not alone in their efforts to guide their high school students. (P)

These activities should help the Action Teams learn more about the feasibility and implications of home visits for more students at the high school level.

Referrals for special services. Teachers may refer any student (not just those in special programs) for special services. Four Assistant Principals divide students into alphabetical groups and are responsible for responding to referrals from teachers to learn why students are having problems in class, and for arranging appropriate social or academic services to help students solve their problems. Families need to know about this service, which administrator is responsible for their child, and how to reach that individual if they want information or assistance. (K)

Futures Advocates call families of their students about every other month to maintain positive communications, and to ask if parents have any concerns or if the student or family need assistance of any kind. If the assistance needed is *not* related to the students' school work, the Advocates help arrange for the assistance with other service providers. Social and emotional support services for teens assist families with parenting skills. (P)

Another school uses a Case Management Approach to special services. An Assistant Principal, nurse, and other team members meet for one full day each week to discuss students who are referred for extra help. Parents are given 10-days advance notice of these meetings and are invited to attend the session with their teens to review and consider helpful interventions for their teens. Some parents cannot take time off from work, but of the 14 students scheduled every week, about 8 parents attend the meetings. (K)

A referral format called *CHAT*, for the *Chesapeake High Assistance Team* is a state-sponsored referral program that allows teachers to refer students to a case manager for

attention to perceived problems. This might include problems with drugs, alcohol, peers, other relationships, or other problems. The case manager talks with the student, teachers, and others at the school who have contact with the student to assess the student's needs and how to solve the problems. Students may be offered assistance through a support group or other counseling. The student has the option of accepting the offered services or not. CHAT assists families with the supervision and care of their teens, but presently does not involve families. (C)

Some programs aim to help students who are facing serious academic or behavior problems. One school engages in an *In-School Alternative to Suspension* -- a time-out classroom. Students may be sent to this classroom three times before they are sent to office for suspension. Families need to know about this policy and their children's participation prior to the more serious suspensions that require family involvement. (C)

Parenting skills and family support. Plans are to provide short summaries on topics that parents request about parenting teens in the 1990s. Many parents in the school are quite young, and had their children when they were teens themselves. Some are intimidated by the school; some attended this high school and had some of the same teachers as their teens. The Futures staff tries to assure students' parents that they are very welcome at the school and in the Futures office. Then, they need good information for the parents who visit. The summaries about adolescence may be generally useful to all families in the school. (D)

The school team is considering ways to involve families in parent support groups. These might meet once a quarter to discuss parenting issues. The meetings might be held in conjunction with other strategic meetings or special events that bring families to the school.

This school team discussed the need to find or develop a program to teach parenting skills to the students who are teen parents. Presently, the young parents are not equipped to deal with their infants and toddlers, nor do they know the systems in the community that could assist them. These activities also could include the families of the teen parents. (D)

Students and families may be provided with information, options, and ideas about what to do when deaths occur in students' families or in the families of their friends and neighbors. The topic of grief and grieving may be important for some high schools to address if students are faced with the deaths of friends or families from natural causes, AIDS, drugs, other illnesses, and various forms of violence. Several forms of information and guidance may be explored to assist students and their families with this difficult topic. (D)

Challenges: Type 1 Activities

Type 1 includes all activities that schools select to help parents increase their understanding of adolescent development, parenting skills, and conditions at home that support the youngster as a student. Type 1 activities also assist schools to increase their understanding of the backgrounds, cultures, goals, and talents of students and their families.

In most schools, topics of adolescent development, parenting, and home environments for learning are explored in workshops that are attended by very few people. Or, parents are advised about parenting and other responsibilities when their students are in trouble, disciplined for behavior problems, or suspended. One challenge for Type 1 workshops or other strategies is to provide information to all families, not just those who can easily attend a workshop at school, and not just as crisis interventions.

The schools in this project have started with a trust fund of activities or ideas to assist parents with their adolescents and parenting responsibilities. As educators and researchers work together, we will explore designs for other Type 1 activities that address the questions families have about teens at school and at home.

TYPE 2: Communicating with families about school programs and student progress.

The project schools provided some experiences and ideas for activities to communicate with families about the transition to high school, Back-to-School nights and other orientations, parent-teacher-student pledges, positive mail and phone calls, and many other examples of school-to-home communications.

Transition to high school from middle school. Several schools are conducting practices to introduce eighth graders in middle schools to the high schools. Some of these transitional activities involve families, and others could with minor alterations in design.

Tours for middle grades students. Students may choose this high school or a local vocational school. In order to increase the number of families who choose this high school, parents of eighth graders are invited to visit and attend a meeting to hear about what the program offers their children. Eighth grade students also tour the high school and observe classes. (C)

Eighth graders visit the high school in June for a half-day tour and assembly. Families are not yet included in this activity, but could be. (K)

Preparing for high school. A guidance counselor goes to the middle school to discuss this high school and to describe ninth grade courses. Also, some high school teachers invite middle school youngsters to visit their classes. Middle grades students make course selections for grade 9 in the spring of grade 8. In this case, the middle school is in the same physical complex as the high school, and so it would be relatively easy to extend transition activities to include families in visits to the high school. It also is possible to provide families with information and to alter schedules so that families can confer with their teens about their course choices. (I)

Eighth grade students pick up their *assigned* schedules for ninth grade courses, and parents are asked to sign these plans. No prior information is given to parents on the process or consequences of course assignments or selection. Teachers from the high school go to the middle school to talk with students about the high school programs. Parents are not yet formally included in these activities, but could be. (H)

Orientation and welcome. One Action Team holds a summer picnic as a culminating activity for the incoming ninth graders to the Futures program who attend a summer preparatory program. The summer program includes study skills, job interview skills, and other basic skills and enrichment activities to help eighth graders make a successful transition to high school. The Action Team will consider how to include families in this orientation before school begins in the fall. (P)

A letter is sent during the summer welcoming incoming ninth graders and their families to this high school. (C)

Before school begins in the fall, all Futures students and families are invited to come to the high school one evening to obtain information for the new school year. They receive information on courses and programs, and how to contact key people at the school. This "head start" on high school is offered to support students and families in an important transition. (P)

The staff will work to increase and improve information for parents at the Fall Orientation Meeting about attendance, the consequences of absence and lateness, grading and testing practices, goal setting activities in the Futures program, and preliminary information on planning for college or work. (P)

One Action Team sends individual invitations to all ninth graders and their families to come to a Ninth Grade Orientation the week before school starts. All ninth grade teachers attend. After a brief meeting to introduce school staff, students receive their schedules. A social activity also is conducted where a $25 gift certificate door prize is awarded to a family. Tickets for the drawing include the families' names, addresses, and phone numbers to help update school records and to document who attends. (H)

Another high school orients ninth graders on the first two days of school. They do not attend regular classes, but are introduced to the school, policies, rules, classes, requirements, and opportunities. Parents are not involved in these activities, but are provided an orientation meeting. (K)

Parents are invited to an orientation meeting at the end of September, including a meeting and a raffle for a TV. Many ninth graders' families attended to hear information about the school. The Team hopes that by meeting with parents of ninth graders early in the school year, more of them will understand the importance of their continuing role in their teens' high school education. (K)

One Action Team plans to encourage teachers to write brief introductory letters to their students' families about their courses, policies, and requirements for students, attitudes supporting parent involvement, phone numbers, times to call the teacher with questions, and other information. These clear, easy-to-read letters will be mailed to families at the start of the school year to establish a personal and positive connection between school and home. (P)

Back-To-School Night. Almost all of the high schools mentioned the importance of a major "open house" held in the fall to meet all families, especially the families of incoming ninth graders. At these meetings, families usually follow their own student's scheduled classes to obtain general information from each teacher. This is not a time for individual conferences, but time for all families to meet the teachers and hear about the programs for the year. It also is a time that families can meet each other, and hear about each teacher's activities that inform and involve families. (K)

Despite wide publicity, in most high schools only a small number of families attend Back-to-School Night. For example, in one suburban high school in this project, teachers estimated that about 32 of 260 (about 12%) of the ninth graders' parents attended the evening meeting in the Fall, 1991. A general trend is for more ninth graders' families to attend than families of students in other grades.

Several Action Teams are considering how to improve the *invitation process* and the *content* of the general meeting and meetings that occur in each teacher's classroom.

At a general meeting. One Action Team is considering possible new formats, contents, and purposes for the meeting. They want to use Back-to-School Night as a time to build good relationships with parents. One idea is to conduct a large-group meeting to introduce the school staff to parents; provide an information sheet with teacher and staff names, phone numbers, best times to contact; discuss ways that parents can become involved; and include a presentation by the PTSA. Another school initiated a process at their fall meeting to identify potential volunteers for the school. (H,F)

Another idea is to arrange small-group discussions about the school between one educator and about 10-15 parents. The discussions would focus on topics of interest to parents of ninth graders, such as students' programs, important school rules, teacher expectations, and school activities. The same staff member would call the parents about two weeks later to check up on the teen's transition to high school. This would encourage a small group of parents to relate to a particular teacher or staff member for information or assistance during the school year. (H)

As the Action Team discussed their plans, they noted other needed improvements:

- Produce "handouts" that summarize the information for the meeting, and provide these to families who could not attend.
- Assign teachers to meet students and families in the halls and to give directions to classrooms.
- Include a social activity at the end of the evening, perhaps with participation from student organizations, and refreshments for all.
- Develop a form that teachers can use as they follow up families with phone calls. The form would help teachers record the name, time, and results of the calls.

This school's Team also identified questions that they need to resolve in order to improve contacts with families of incoming ninth graders, starting with Back-to-School Night:

- How can the students be helped to understand the importance of Back-to-School night, and encourage their parents to attend?
- What recruitment, publicity, and incentives are necessary to increase parent participation?
- What are the teachers' roles for improving Back-to-School Night?
- How will school staff inform and followup the parents who do not attend?
- How will the Team recognize teachers who conduct these activities, and parents and students who participate? (H)

In a teacher's classroom. One plan is to put important information about school rules, homework, testing, and other policies, class work, important school phone numbers, and other issues in easy-to-read forms to give to parents to take with them, and to send to parents who could not come to Back to School Night. The packets of fliers also will be provided as a "Welcome-Wagon Pack" by the guidance counselor to parents who register a new student after the start of the year. This should provide all families with good information and evidence of the school's attitude about the importance of families in their teen's education. (C)

School-to-home-to-school communications. Most high schools conduct some communications with families, but they are not always clear and they do not

always reach all families. Also, high schools need but do not get enough of the good information that families can provide about their teenagers' talents and needs. The lack of home-to-school communications perpetuates teachers' beliefs that parents do not care about connections with the school. The schools in the project outlined some of their present practices and future plans for more effective two-way communications.

Newsletters. School or class newsletters are common communications from school to home in the high schools in this project. They vary in form, frequency, and in how families learn about and receive them. The variations are informative.

Newsletters go home to families by mail about every six weeks. The newsletters contain forms that parents can clip to request a conference with a teacher. Students are supposed to return the requests from parents. Very few parents use these forms, however, and students do not always deliver the forms that are sent to the teacher. (C)

In another school, newsletters are mailed home monthly that include anecdotes or other information submitted by teachers. The newsletter emphasizes students' names, activities, and accomplishments. (K)

In several schools, the Maryland's Tomorrow programs have separate newsletters about program activities and participants that are mailed home on a regular schedule. One school highlights specific topics, such as how to apply for a special program at the voc-tech high school. (H, K, F)

A newsletter is produced by Maryland's Tomorrow students for all incoming ninth graders and their families. It includes general information for students such as the fall schedule, the first football game, and school expectations. It also includes a section for families about how to become more involved at the high school level. The newsletter aims to give ninth graders and their families a clear and early message that the school will be communicating with them about information that is important for students. Future newsletters for all families will include news and activities at the school. (F)

Similarly, Futures students in a summer program produced a newsletter for all incoming ninth graders and their families. The newsletters were printed by the local city paper as a business-school partnership activity. They were mailed to Futures families and carried home by all students at the start of the school year. The newsletter could be continued on a regular schedule through the year. (D)

Phone calls. Individual teachers and administrators call parents at their own discretion. Some phone calls are targeted for ninth graders, or to alert families to their teen's absence, or other problems.

Ninth grade homeroom teachers are given a list of ten students' home phone numbers to make a friendly phone call within the first few weeks of school and to make contact with their students' families. This included the parents who attended and those who did not attend the Back-to-School Night. (H)

Students and some English teachers on a ninth grade Steering Committee call some parents to personally invite them to parent-teacher conferences. (C)

Teachers on duty as "attendance callers" phone parents when students are absent. In addition to this school-wide activity, the Maryland's Tomorrow staff also calls students' families about absences, as do the teachers of other special programs. The English department also sends letters home weekly to parents of students who are absent or late. (C)

Four teachers, pupil personnel workers, and an assistant principal form a team to call families of absent students. (K)

Positive communications. Most messages from high schools are about students' behavior, academic, or attendance problems. A program coordinator reported that when something is mailed home, the students "freak out." She believes that if there were more frequent and more positive communications starting in ninth grade (and continuing through the years), students and families would form more positive attitudes and behaviors about school. (D) Several of the Action Teams in this project are planning to design and use *positive communications* about students' progress, accomplishments, service, and other contributions.

Parents are sent good news about student progress to help families celebrate students' activities and accomplishments. (P)

Teachers send home thank you notes to parents for attending parent-teacher conference night. (C)

The school designed, printed, and stamped "positive postcards" for teachers to send to parents to share good news about students' work, behavior, or other accomplishments or contributions to the school. (K)

To encourage delivery and eliminate interception of mail, teachers draw happy faces on envelopes mailed home in order to let students and families know that it contains good news or helpful information. A label announcing "Good News" or an equivalent message would systematize this approach and could help change students' and parents' views that all mail from the school means "trouble." Other ideas for improving the mail include sending communications to the parent or guardian by name, and not "To the parent of *student's name*." (C)

Recognitions. High schools are beginning to realize that families want and need to know about the progress that students are making. The project high schools are thinking about how they recognize student accomplishments and how to inform and involve families in those celebrations. They identified a number of awards that could include communications with families.

This school recognizes ninth graders' accomplishments in attendance, sports, honor roll, "close to honor roll," and other achievements at the end of each quarter. Teachers estimate that about one half of the ninth graders receive at least one recognition award during the year. (K)

Maryland's Tomorrow conducted "breakfasts" to recognize students for accomplishments. Now, the school conducts "honors pizza assemblies," sometimes for up to 500 students. (K)

"Values pins" are awarded twice a year to about 30 students who are recognized for outstanding personal qualities. The teachers believe that these pins are highly prized by students, with some pinning them to their graduation robes. (K)

Students in the Maryland's Tomorrow program who attend the first four days of any week are invited to breakfast on the fifth day; those with perfect attendance for a month are invited to lunch; and those with perfect attendance for a quarter *or* 50% improvement over the previous quarter are invited to dinner. Of 60 students in the program at the end of the past school year, 18 (30%) were invited to dinner during the school year. The Maryland's Tomorrow staff observes that this reward structure leads to better attendance and better rates of promotion to the next grade. (C)

Presently, these recognition ceremonies or assemblies are for students only. Parents could be invited to some or all, or at least informed officially of their teen's accomplishments. It is likely that many students share and celebrate their awards at home, but it should be possible to make more formal reports of accomplishments to families and to the community. This may include open assemblies, names in the school or local newsletters, and on local radio or cable TV. (K)

Academic reports. Report cards and interim reports are issued regularly to inform families of their children's progress in their courses. Grades may be determined on the basis of 50% classwork, 25% homework, and 25% tests, although these percentages may vary from teacher to teacher. Many families are not informed about the components of report card grades. Each teacher could help by making the grading criteria clear to students and to families.

Mid-term (interim) reports are sent to parents between report cards if students are in danger of failing one or more subjects. Conferences are requested and some are conducted.

Pre-mid-term (early-warning) notices are sent home to families of ninth graders who are in serious danger of failing. The extra communications each quarter for ninth graders aim to show students and their families that the school is very serious about completing assignments, participating in class, and passing each course. (C)

Interim reports (after about five weeks, half-way through each quarter) are signed by the student and teacher at school, mailed home, signed by a parent, and returned to school. Each teacher is responsible for monitoring whether students return the signed reports, however, and there is no formal monitoring of the process. (K)

Counselors call some students' parents to alert them to serious problems before report cards were sent home. Parents are asked to meet with their teen's teachers on conference night or at another time. (H)

The first three reports cards each year are taken home by students, and a fourth is mailed at the end of the school year. (K)

Report cards are mailed to families. Parents are supposed to sign the cards, but there is no formal accountability system for their return. (H)

Some students with academic or other problems are asked to carry a card about their progress that requires daily signatures from teachers and parents for a week or two. This monitoring system may be requested by a parent or a teacher. The process, however, is embarrassing to students and is difficult to implement, according to teachers. (C)

Family-student-teacher pledges. The Action Team is exploring designs for pledges or contracts to obtain commitments from parents, students, and Futures Advocates to conduct their unique and shared responsibilities to support students' success in school. For students, the pledges will specify a commitment to classwork, homework, and communicating with their families. For parents, pledges will request their support for the Futures program in general, participation in meetings, conferences, and support at home for their children's education. For Advocates, pledges will include their commitment to counseling and assisting students with their work and plans for the future, and regular communications with their students' families. (P)

Home to school communications. A teacher designed a short questionnaire for parents who come to her classroom on Back-to-School Night that asks them to tell some good things about their teens. (E)

In more than one of the project high schools, if students have five unexcused absences in a quarter they fail the course for that marking period. Presently, most families have little information about this policy that seriously affects students' success in school. Families need to know when and how to provide written excuses for each absence.

Teachers say, for example, that some parents telephone the school to report an illness, and then do not think they need to write an excuse.

In this school, about 350 students (about 30%) are absent on an average day. After five unexcused absences, students have failed the class, and have little incentive to attend the class for the rest of the marking period. Their extended absence puts them even further behind in their work in the next marking period. Thus, there are important connections between the attendance policy, student failure, and dropping out. The Action Team recognizes that students and families need better information starting in grade 9 about the attendance policy, student and family responsibilities, and the implications for passing courses. (P)

General information for families. The Action Team leader and researchers discussed the possibility of designing easy-to-read information flyers that summarize key points for parents that the Futures Advocates could discuss in their individual meetings with parents. The "one-pagers" (attractive, large type, clear vocabulary) would provide information about visiting the school, attendance and homework policies, students' course choices each year, summer opportunities, special education, and other topics. These could be shared with all parents, not just those in the Futures program, beginning with the families of ninth graders. (D)

"Key contacts" for families. Several high schools in this project are considering how to assign teachers or staff members to serve as "key contacts" for each student and family. This individual would make at least one person-to-person contact (at the school, by phone, in the community, or at home) at the start of the ninth grade to talk with each family, provide basic information about high school and the upcoming school year, and provide phone numbers and hours that the family can call to ask questions or obtain information through the year. Other ideas are to assign key contacts to families at the start of each school year, or at the Back-to-School Night. Some high schools assign students to the same homeroom every year, making it possible for one teacher/advisor to be a continuous contact for students and families throughout high school. (C, E, H, K)

Conferences. Parent Conference Nights are held three times a year after report cards are issued. Teachers use the report card or call parents to request a conference, usually for students with Ds and Es. Some parents and the students come to the conferences when requested to do so, but others do not come. Also, on conference nights some parents of highly successful students come on their own to talk with the teacher. (C)

Two schools conduct parent-teacher conferences at mid-term instead of when report cards are issued. In one of these schools, teachers reported an increase in the number of parents who participated. One teacher also created a form for parents to fill out when they come in for a conference that asks them to share information about their teen's strengths and goals that they want the teacher to know. (E, H)

Four evening meetings with parents and students in the Futures program are scheduled each year. Parents are given information to help them understand the high school organization, and to hear from students and alumni who have been successful in the Futures program. Many of the parents work during the day. The Futures staff notes that meetings need to be interesting and important to convince parents to come to the school at night. The school is situated on a large campus at the edge of the city, making travel difficult and sometimes risky. One of the Team's goals is to find a way to get the information from these meetings to the parents who cannot attend. (P)

Futures counselors and advocates meet individually or talk with the parents of Futures students monthly. They provide general information to parents and give personal attention to students' or families' special needs. This includes information on each student's attendance, and opportunities for parents to ask questions and receive information that they want. No group parent meetings were held last year for parents in the program, but some Futures parents did attend some PTO meetings. (D)

Few families come to the high school during American Education Week. Although coffee and donuts are available, and parents are invited to attend classes, most do not take off from work or come from home to visit the school. Some families only visit the schools of their younger children. Teachers believe that most high school students do not want their parents sitting in their classes during the school day. Educators and students need to decide whether it is important to have special activities or assemblies for families during this week, or whether to continue the more informal approach, leaving it up to families whether to attend or not. (K)

Special education ARD (Assessment, Review, and Dismissal) conferences are held with parents of students in special education programs if the school plans to *change* students' services, classes, or program assignments. (C)

As required by law, meetings are scheduled twice a year with parents of students in special education programs to explain, monitor, and if necessary, revise students' educational programs. (K)

The FUTURES program staff maintains an "open door" policy that allows parents direct access to the staff if they come to the school building for a visit, conference, or with a question. These parents do not have to check in with the more impersonal main office. (P)

Use of the local media. One Action Team seeks to make better use of local TV, radio, and newspapers, in order to improve ways that information is distributed to students and parents. For example, it may be possible to increase family awareness that conferences are being held or that report cards are being distributed at a particular time with a variety of announcements and reminders in the media. (P)

Challenges: Type 2 Activities

Type 2 includes all activities that schools select to communicate with families and students about high school programs and about student progress. This includes letters, memos, report cards, conferences, and other mechanisms that send information from school to home. Type 2 activities also assist schools by arranging home-to-school communications and responses about students, their programs, and progress.

The high schools in this project have many examples of Type 2 activities in their trust funds for building better partnerships, as do most schools at all grade levels. However, not all of the activities are understood by parents, and not all include all families. One challenge of Type 2 is for high schools to know who they are reaching and who they are not reaching with information to keep families informed of the school, its programs, and the teen's progress. Other challenges concern the form, frequency or schedule, content, clarity, and meaning of meetings and other communications, so that all families receive information that they can understand and use to assist their students. A constant challenge is to balance the number of times parents are requested or required to come to the school building with other ways of receiving good information.

Researchers and educators in this project will be paying attention to the design of other Type 2 activities that are clear and helpful to families of students from the freshman to senior year.

TYPE 3: Volunteering – Inviting families to come to school as volunteers and audiences to support students and school programs.

The project schools provided some experiences and ideas for activities to organize volunteers as attendance callers, presenters about careers, parents helping other parents, mentors for students, examples of successful alumni, and providers of assistance to the school. They also provided ideas about scheduling opportunities for families to come as audiences for student performances and activities were also provided.

Volunteers. Band and sports boosters involve parents as volunteer fund raisers and audiences. Also, a few parents volunteer to accompany students and teachers on some field trips. Several Action Teams plan to improve procedures to contact the parents who volunteer to help the school. The schools recognize the need for someone at the school to coordinate the assignments of volunteers. (C, K, H)

At a Ninth Grade Orientation and at Back-to-School Night, parents sign up to volunteer to assist activities at the school, and several started immediately. (H)

The Futures leader is concerned about more than two dozen severely economically distressed families and students who are in great need of assistance from the community. She would like to expand a parent and student committee to assist families who need food or other special assistance at holiday times during the year. In the past, students filled Thanksgiving baskets of food for about 25 families, but more could be done if volunteers, including parents, were better organized to provide strategic support through the year. (D)

A "bank" of information on parents' occupations and work locations will be developed in order to invite people with different skills to come to the school to talk with students. This information will serve as a catalogue of contacts for student trips to local sites to discuss features and qualifications for various occupations and careers. (F)

Volunteers serve as Attendance Callers to contact the parents of Futures students who are absent from school. The Action Team will explore how to extend this service to all families of absent students, and not just those in the Futures Program, beginning with ninth graders. (P)

One Action Team plans to implement practices that celebrate the accomplishments of successful alumni with students and parents. This includes providing information to students and parents about alternative directions and decisions concerning work or education in and after high school. A "Hall of Fame" concept may be used to organize activities to feature successful alumni. (K)

About ninety African-American male students are enrolled in a mentoring program with about thirty African-American men from the community. They meet once a month for events and activities. The mentors may have contact with the students' teachers, but usually not with families. The project will consider ways to inform families about the program and about appropriate follow-up activities if their teens are involved. (F)

Audiences. Parents are not usually invited to special assemblies or events, but they could be.

One school initiated "Presents for Presence" to increase student attendance and to reduce the high rate of chronic absence at the school. Each month students are selected to receive free ice cream, or an item from the school store, or to attend a pizza party. The Team will identify ways to inform and/or involve families of good attendance awards.

Students with quarterly averages of 3.0 or better are invited with their parents to a breakfast and recognition ceremony at the school.

Each month each department chooses one student for recognition by the school. The students' parents are invited to the assembly, where a certificate is awarded and a teacher talks about the student who was selected. (H)

Large numbers of parents come to one high school as audiences for Christmas concerts, dramatic productions, senior awards, other awards, sports events, and fund raisers -- particularly an annual dinner to raise money for the school. As part of its short-term plan, the school held a Parent Appreciation Dance and a PTSA-sponsored Volleyball Tournament for students, teachers, and parents. (C)

Challenges: Type 3 Activities

Type 3 includes all activities that schools select to encourage parents to volunteer their time to support school goals or student learning, including serving as volunteers, coming as audiences for performances, sports, or events, and conducting other supportive services.

Volunteers all but disappear from most high schools, or take new forms such as booster clubs and other fund raising activities that are closely linked to Type 5 decision making activities where a small number of parent leaders conduct activities to benefit specific groups of students, clubs, or teams. One challenge of Type 3 is for high schools to identify their needs for volunteers, and to open opportunities to all family members who want to assist the school, teachers, and students. Another challenge is to redefine volunteer work to include anyone, any place, any time who supports school goals and students' learning and development, thus opening the possibility for volunteers and audiences to conduct activities at home or in the community. A third challenge is to schedule volunteers and events for audiences to maximize and diversify participation by many families, accounting for varied work schedules and other constraints on coming to school. All of these challenges could be met if there were a parent or staff coordinator of volunteers, and workable procedures to match volunteers with tasks requested by teachers, administrators, students, or others.

The project schools have begun to think about better ways to identify and match volunteers with the needs of their schools.

TYPE 4: Involving families in interactions with their teen on homework and other curricular activities and decisions.

The high schools provided some experiences and initial ideas for involving families in students' goal-setting activities including interactive homework, selecting courses, and planning for careers and college.

Course selection. Presently, each year, parents sign their teen's course selection sheet after a guidance counselor has discussed the courses with students in class.

Students are given booklets describing the courses, but parents are not well informed or involved in discussions with their teens about choices of courses.

Many students and families do not understand the requirements for the students' educational and occupational goals, nor the courses needed for admission to colleges, community colleges, or other programs. Because these decisions largely determine students' directions in high school and affect their goals and attainments, the Action Team wants to explore how to involve families when students select their courses each year, so that families can help influence their teens to take courses that will keep their options open for post high school plans. New information for parents may be provided in printed materials, meetings, videos, or in other forms. (E)

One Action Team is considering focusing more attention on the link between students' goals and their course assignments in math in grades 9 and 10. Many students in the Futures Program are assigned to Applied Math 1 (basic math), Applied Math 2 (consumer math) or Applied Math 3 (high level survey course of basic math skills). Students who begin with Applied Math in ninth grade usually do not get to take courses such as algebra or geometry that they need if they want to attend a four-year college. The Futures math teacher plans to place as many students as possible in a regular algebra class in grade 9 so that they have a chance to meet their aspirations for post-secondary education.

The Team also will review the information families need about math course choices and placements so that they understand the implications and consequences of actions that involve their teens, and so that they can work with the school to influence students' decisions to take the math classes that will help them meet their goals for postsecondary education. (P)

Student goal setting. Prior to the start of this project, this school developed a process to help students learn to set goals for themselves in achievement, attendance, self-confidence, and other areas important for success. During one social studies class, students write personal goals for the year. The next day, during one English class, the students write strategies they will use to attain their goals. The goals and strategies are filed in English writing folders and evaluated at the end of each quarter. Students may nominate themselves for recognition for attaining their goals. An end-of-year evaluation also asks the students to evaluate the goal setting process.

The Action Team is considering how to encourage students to communicate with their families about their goals and strategies. For example, students may take their goals home overnight to discuss them with a family member, and gather reactions and suggestions for attaining the goals. This interactive homework assignment, conducted by the students, would inform families about the school's goal-setting activity and would engage families in discussions with their teens about improving attendance, achievement, and self-confidence. Families could continue to be involved periodically as students monitor their progress toward their goals. (K)

Planning for college. Parents of 11th graders are invited to a meeting with the guidance department for information on college choices, requirements, and finances. All students in standard and honors English take the PSAT *at no charge* in the 10th and 11th grades. Students take the SATs at their own expense in the 11th or 12 grades, or both. Prep or practice classes are offered by the school for PSAT and SAT tests. About 100 students took the SAT last year, and about 60 of these went on to some postsecondary education, mainly part-time at a local community college. The Action Team will explore how to provide better information for ninth and tenth grade students and their families about college plans and requirements, scholarship and loan programs, and other information on post-secondary education, and how to increase attendance of eleventh graders' families at the meeting about planning for college.

Teachers believe that costs keep many students away from attending local and other four-year colleges. Families need information early in students' high school careers about the comparative costs for tuition, travel, other expenses of two-year and four-year colleges, and how to plan ahead to cover these costs. Many students choose to work full time and attend a community college part time. This, however, does not match their or their families' aspirations to attend four-year colleges. The Action Team is considering how to bring this information to students and to families, including inviting successful alumni who have taken various routes after high school to come and talk to students and to their families about college requirements and results. One goal is to get students and their families talking earlier about the choices of courses and other activities in grades nine and ten so that more students keep options open for post-secondary education that will help them reach their goals. (K)

Planning for careers. New directions are planned for career guidance activities. Students take an interest inventory, but, presently, little is done in ninth grade to bring families into the process of career exploration or planning for careers or college. One idea is to conduct a spring activity, "College and Me," to bring students and parents more information about college planning, financial planning, financial aid, course choices in grades 10-12, and other information. Parents will be invited to visit the local community college that is attended by many graduates. The team wants to make clearer to students and their families why students are required to take certain courses, and why they should choose particular courses to reach their educational goals. (K)

Challenges: Type 4 Activities

Type 4 includes all activities that schools select to improve family involvement in learning activities at home, including involvement in homework, classwork, and curricular-related interactions and decisions.

The project high schools, as most schools, have few Type 4 activities in their current practice. Although educators can think of appropriate activities, they often lag in implementing them because Type 4 activities require the understanding, hard work, and coordination of teachers and students, or counselors and students, along with family members. Teachers of academic subjects usually give little attention to students' families until students are at serious risk of failing, and then it is too late to view family interactions as positive motivational tools.

One challenge of Type 4 is for high schools to design activities that assure the active participation of the students themselves, such as conducting the discussions and conversations at home about schoolwork, homework, career plans, college plans, course choices, and other decisions. Another challenge is for teachers within departments, or teachers and counselors to collaborate so that they can create interactive activities they can share, instead of developing all activities individually.

In this project, educators and researchers will collect examples of interactive homework to learn about the feasibility of asking students to conduct activities that increase parental participation in curricular-related discussions and decisions.

TYPE 5: Decision Making – Involving families in decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA, committee councils, and other parent organizations.

The high schools provided some experiences and ideas about parent organizations, increasing membership and activities, and involving families in school decision making and advisory groups.

Parent organizations. Not all high schools have active PTAs, PTOs, PTSAs or other parent organizations. Several of the project high schools only recently added these organizations and report low levels of involvement (H, K). For example, a PTSA -- Parent, Teacher, Student Association -- started in 1991, claims about 72 of 200 ninth graders' parents and 42 ninth grade students joined at a cost of $1 per membership. The PTSA held a few workshops in the past school year, but few parents attended (C).

The Action Teams are considering ways to strengthen the organization in order to represent and involve more parents.

At a school with no PTO or PTA, the Action Team aims to explore how to start a parent organization, and how to enable parents to help other parents with information about the school and community (P).

Other parent groups organize participation in fund raising activities for the band, and for other school activities. (K)

Decision making. In all of the project high schools, the Action Teams include parent representatives who will help review the school's survey data and plan the next steps in partnerships. Other opportunities for parent representation in advisory and decision making groups will be explored. For example, parents are not yet included on the Management Team for the Maryland's Tomorrow program or other school-based management committees, but could be. (H, E, P)

There is an active School Improvement Team that includes parents, teachers, administrators, and students. It meets regularly, sends information about the school to parents, and the principal calls upon the group for advice and support. (D)

Challenges: Type 5 Activities

Type 5 includes all activities that schools select to include families and others in the community in leadership, advisory, decision making, and advocacy roles in parent associations, advisory committees, school improvement teams, school-site councils, or other school-based policy making bodies. Type 5 activities also include parent and community activities in independent advocacy groups that work for school improvement.

One challenge facing Type 5 activities is to assure that there is a parent organization, that parents are represented on decision making councils or committees, and that parents are represented on the Action Team for School and Family Partnerships. A related challenge concerns who serves in these leadership positions, and whose voices are heard. High schools must consider and find ways to diversify participants so that all groups, neighborhoods, and interests are represented. Because only a few parents take leadership roles, Type 5 activities must be designed so that parent leaders work as true representatives, gathering information from and providing information to those they represent on the decisions that are made in their organizations or committees.

The schools in this project have short histories on Type 5 activities, with relatively weak parent organizations. All of the schools will include parents on the Action Teams for this project, but need to explore ways to strengthen the other policy-related activities to include families.

TYPE 6: Collaborating with community – Informing and involving families and students in community programs, and gathering community resources to strengthen school programs for students and families.

The high schools provided some experiences and ideas for school-business-community partnerships, school-linked health programs, community service, workshops on community resources, and the involvement of families in these activities.

School-business partnerships. The principal meets monthly with the school's business partners. The Action Team would like to add a teacher, a parent, and a student to a committee for extending and improving partnerships with local businesses. (E)

The school and three business partners -- Franklin Square Hospital, McCormick, and AAI -- are working to find ways to be helpful to each other. The partners could help the school make important connections with families, particularly those parents who are workers in the firms. Business partners also could inform families or include them in appropriate ways in activities that they conduct with students. (K)

The school has support from a private industry council that is paying for a summer program for Maryland's Tomorrow students. (H)

Several community shops give students a card entitling them to a 10% discount on their purchases if they have a grade point average of 3.0 and are absent fewer than 8 days per year. A couple of hundred students qualify each year (about 15-20% of the school). Families are probably informed about this award by their teens if they qualify, but it is not clear how well all families are informed about the program. The awards not only celebrate students' accomplishments, but also have direct impact on families because the card saves them money. (K)

Students may choose a program to familiarize them with local businesses and potential occupations in the tenth grade, and may choose a "work experience" program in the eleventh grade. These opportunities help to guarantee some students jobs after they graduate from high school if they meet certain criteria set by the employers. The Action Team aims to involve parents in more active roles in helping eleventh grade students in the work experience program to reach their goals.

The Team also plans to begin the sequence with a job-planning activity for ninth graders. This will include field trips for small groups of ninth grade students and family members to visit a local business to discuss employee expectations and other aspects of occupations and careers. (E)

Health services. Health care and health education are provided at the school by a medical practitioner from the community who works with the students on many topics, including pregnancy prevention and prenatal care. The school is adding a day care center for the infants and toddlers of teen parents. The school also collaborates with a wellness clinic to address issues of family planning and sexually transmitted diseases. More systematic attention could be given to connections with the teens' own parents about medical care or day care. A Health Fair is planned to help the students' families and the community better understand teen health issues and services that are available in the community. (K)

Parents are offered a series of free workshops on drug abuse prevention, with help from a community nurse, and in connection with a community organization called NICE -- Neighbors Involved in the Community of Edgewood. (F)

This school team is considering how a partnership with Kaiser Permanente can help to improve school programs and ties to families. (P)

Service to the community. As part of the summer orientation to one Futures program for the incoming ninth graders, students worked with Magic Me, a community service organization. The students produced art work for a nursing home, made toys for a homeless shelter, and sewed clothing for students who violate the school dress code. These and other activities link students, school, and community, and could be shared with families and with others in the community. (D)

One teacher runs a school-community recycling project that could be extended to include families and teachers as volunteers. (E)

SMILES is a program in which students volunteer to become involved in the community. Parents assist in running the program and in providing students with transportation to some locations for their volunteer work. SMILES has received good publicity and has increased feelings of good will in the community for the school. (H)

The first annual community fair was held in 1991-92 and raised $10,000 for the school. The fair increased positive feelings between the school and many community groups and agencies. In coming years, the Action Team plans to get more families actively involved in the Fair. (E)

Challenges: Type 6 Activities

Type 6 includes all activities that schools select to collaborate with community organizations, groups, or institutions that share an interest in or responsibility for children's learning, development, and success. Type 6 also includes activities that organize better access to community resources to assist students, families, or educators.

One challenge of Type 6 is for high schools to develop partnerships with businesses, libraries, parks and recreation departments, health, labor, and other organizations, and other community groups that contribute to a broad plan for school improvement, student experiences and success, and family services. The challenge is to make connections that are coherent with school and family goals, and that accumulate with other contributions to improve school programs, strengthen families, and assist students. A related challenge is to make access and benefits equitable, so that all students and families are informed about and benefitted by various collaborations with the community.

Most schools have business partnerships, but these often affect only a few students or teachers; most students are involved in their communities in part time jobs or recreational activities, but not all students or families know how to access services or programs. The high schools in this project will be working to develop stronger and more pertinent ties with community groups and organizations to assist students and families.

Summary: Catalogue of High School Practices of Partnerships

Table 1 lists the experiences and plans for partnership that were in the high schools' trust funds at the start of the project, according to the six types of involvement. The *columns* show the ideas and practices of each high school. The rows indicate some of the common ideas and practices across schools. For example, the schools are most familiar with activities and ideas for communicating with families about school programs and students' progress (Type 2). Most of them have Back-to-School Nights, mail newsletters, make phone calls, and hold conferences. Most also have business-school partnerships and community service activities. Many of their ideas and plans, however, are about *how to improve* these practices to reach more families.

By contrast, the schools have fewer examples of how to offer families information on adolescent development (Type 1), volunteers (Type 3), activities to become involved in learning activities at home or important curricular-related decisions (Type 4), or decision making structures and opportunities (Type 5). Few of the activities for these types are common or similar across schools.

The entries in italics in the table show the new practices that were added by each school after the surveys of teachers, parents, and students were administered and results were reported to each school. With this information, the project is monitoring how each school in the project "grows its program" over time, and how new ideas for better partnerships emerge in and are shared across the schools.

The table provides a quick inventory of a number of different practices that are considered feasible and important by high school educators, parents, and students. Other high schools can identify ideas in the table that are of interest, and read a fuller description of the activity in the sections above on the six types of involvement.

Next steps. The schools in this project will use data from their surveys of teachers, parents, and students to create-long term, multi-year plans for improving or adding practices of partnership on all six types of involvement. (See Connors and Epstein, 1994 for a descriptive report of results of the surveys.) They will implement or supplement the ideas in their trust funds with practices that parents, teachers, and students agree are important practices of involvement.

Discussion

The initial discussions and plans of the researchers and educators in this project illustrate the potential and identify the challenges for improving family, school, and community partnerships in high schools.

Potential for Partnerships

Six conclusions point to the high potential for partnerships in high schools.

1. **High school educators want to increase and improve their partnerships with families and communities.**

Educators from the six high schools in this project believe that it is important for them to learn more about developing family, school, and community partnerships in order to help more students do better in school.

2. **The high schools in this project had some practices in place to involve families, but not very many families were included in or informed by the existing activities.**

Even the most basic communications are not designed and implemented to reach all families. The "trust funds" varied, with some high schools better endowed than others, and some endowments holding possibilities rather than actual practices.

The educators realized that many of their communications contain negative messages to families about students' problems, and they wanted to increase positive communications immediately. The catalogue of existing activities revealed that families are rarely guided by the schools to discuss important school decisions with their teens or plan for the future. Ideas were generated to increase their trust funds with these activities.

3. High schools can establish Action Teams for School and Family Partnerships to take responsibility to organize more systematic plans for improving activities in six types of involvement.

The speed and effectiveness with which Teams were established varied across schools. Several are still working to develop a full team consisting of teachers, administrators, parents, and students; arrange meeting times, and delegate responsibilities for the different types of involvement. The work of the Action Teams is aided by strong support from the principal, and by small grants to support time to work together and pay for costs of related supplies and materials.

4. High school educators work well with researchers, and can help each other understand and develop better practices of partnership.

With time and support to think and work together, high school educators gave freely of their experiences and ideas. They advised the researchers on important questions about partnerships for surveys of teachers, parents, and students, and agreed to administer the surveys in the ninth grades in their schools.

The educators reported and compared their practices and problems, and shared ideas about solutions. Even in their first meeting, practices reported by one school were adopted or adapted as new ideas by other high schools. Several of the team members have already made presentations to other educators at meetings and conferences. Thus, the team members are experiencing important professional growth, and are now among the few high school educators who can talk knowledgeably about partnerships.

5. Students are key participants in school, family, and community partnerships.

The educators and researchers recognized that most communications and activities must be three-way -- involving teachers, parents, and students. Students are the main reporters of information between school and home, but many students do not do that job well. In large part, they have been left out of partnerships. Often, they are more acted upon than actors in their own education. In order to make successful connections with families, schools need to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of students in all aspects of schooling, including school, family, and community partnerships.

As high school students progress from ninth to twelfth grade, they become increasingly independent. They also should be helped to become more responsible, including communicating effectively between school and home. As the Action Teams shared ideas about practices such as student and family goal-setting and parent-teacher-student conferences, the potential importance of the connections of students, teachers, and families became clear.

The goal of helping students take responsibility for their education was expressed by all of the Action Teams in the project. In developing programs of partnership, high schools need to consider activities that address two issues: How can the school increase students' responsibility for their learning and success? What part do parents play in supporting and assisting their students' success?

6. Many ideas and examples of practices for partnerships were identified that were considered important and appropriate in high schools.

As they assessed their activities and ideas, these educators generated a formidable catalogue of examples of all six of the major types of involvement. They also discussed ways to improve existing practices and to design new practices to increase the involvement of families of incoming ninth graders. The collection of ideas should encourage and assist other high schools to review their present practices and plan more comprehensive programs.

Thus, there is high potential for more effective programs of partnership in high schools, as indicated by the interest of the educators in improving connections, their capacity to plan and work together, a recognition of the importance of high school students in efforts to develop partnerships, and the feasibility of many basic and innovative practices in all six of the major types of involvement.

Challenges for Partnerships

Accompanying the high potential are some serious challenges that teachers believe hinder their own and families' participation in partnerships in high schools. These have implications for the design of programs and their progress in these or other high schools.

The school Action Teams identified ten barriers to effective school and family partnerships in high schools. These involve gaps in teacher knowledge, teachers' beliefs about parents' and students' lack of interest in education, and obstacles to parent participation.

- Teachers believe that some parents -- particularly those who did not complete high school -- are uneasy about coming to the school, because they associate school with their own earlier failures. Teachers assume that these parents are not interested in the school or in their children's education, and do not initiate positive interactions with them.

- Teachers believe that many parents, including working parents and single parents, are over burdened and do not have time to be involved or are apathetic about the school and their teens. Some students get shifted between adult caregivers, and teachers may not know which parent to contact.

- Teachers may not know how to plan full programs of partnerships and are not aware of specific practices that they can use with their students in their classes or homerooms. Many also are unsure of how to adapt practices for use with families with diverse backgrounds and cultures, or for use in special circumstances, such as with families who enter the school mid year or with families experiencing difficulties at home.

- Teachers report lacking guidance from district personnel to help them develop partnerships, and lacking funds for materials or supplies for activities to involve families. Some schools have too few phones, computers, and other equipment that help teachers contact families. Teacher "burnout," few benefits, and little recognition or appreciation were mentioned as reasons that teachers are unmotivated to do more than just teach their subjects.

- Some families need transportation to get to the school to attend meetings.

- If they come to the school, some families need child care for younger children.

- Some parents' work schedules (e.g., shift work, night work, work that requires "comp" time or that penalizes absences) make it hard for them to come to meetings at school. Some can attend only one or two meetings without jeopardizing their pay or status at work.

- Some students do not want their parents to come to the school building. They may fear parents will hear negative reports, or they may fear that they or their family members will be embarrassed. Students may feel highly independent and may not want to look dependent on their parents' interventions at school.

- Some students intercept mail at home because they do not want parents to receive negative reports from school. In these cases, parents may not hear about meetings, or may not receive report cards or other communications.

- Other family or student problems may exist that are beyond the schools' responsibilities, and that prevent parents from giving any extra attention to school matters.

These are common problems in many high schools that must be addressed and resolved as programs of partnership are developed. Solutions to some of the barriers are built into this project's design. For example, the project will help teachers understand a useful framework of six types of involvement to plan and monitor their work, and help them build a repertory of useful practices. Some teachers' assumptions about parents' interests in involvement may be informed or revised by the data they collect from parents and students. (See Connors & Epstein, 1994.)

Steps can be taken to eliminate or minimize the ten barriers. For example, *if* transportation is a problem for bringing families to meetings at school, *then* some attention to transportation is needed when meetings, conferences, assemblies, or special events are scheduled at school. But transportation is not a barrier to providing better information in new communications from school to home. Some barriers may be eliminated incrementally as schools test and improve practices of partnership. Many of the examples of practices catalogued in this report aim to overcome one or more of the ten barriers.

Building on a Trust Fund to Develop a Program of Partnerships

A number of practices in the schools' trust funds in each type of involvement stand out as particularly appropriate for high schools. To improve parenting skills, schools should provide useful and easy-to-read information about adolescent development (Type 1), to improve communications, schools should establish strong connections with parents at the point of transition between the middle grades and high schools (Type 2), to organize volunteers effectively, schools should recruit and coordinate volunteers to help students explore occupations and work sites (Type 3), to involve families in learning activities at home, schools should provide materials and information about setting academic goals, making course choices, and carrying out postsecondary plans (Type 4), to increase participation in decision making roles, schools should review all opportunities for representation on committees and councils, and add student and family representatives from all major subgroups in the school (Type 5), to increase collaborations with the community, schools should organize information on community health services, part time jobs, job training, and other cultural, recreational, and service-oriented programs and resources for families and students.

We will be working with the high schools to learn which *practices* work for which students, families, teachers, and other staff or community groups, and which do not. Some practices look risky because they do not consider *students'* feelings (such as the daily progress reports that must be signed by teachers and parents). Other practices look promising because they build upon students' increasing sense of responsibility (such as students involved in parent-teacher conferences, or students in charge of obtaining ideas and suggestions about their goals and futures from their families).

Some practices look risky because they do not consider *family* life in the 1990s (such as too many meetings at the school that expect too many parents to come without clear and important reasons); others look promising because they account for families' expressed desires to be informed about their children's programs and progress (such as early positive messages to incoming ninth graders' families about the year ahead, and early warning about academic difficulties in time for students and families to prevent failures).

The realities of school life are that people and places change over time. Unexpected events -- changes in principals, project leaders, teacher assignments, team members, and state interventions -- have already affected the progress and directions of these high schools. Except for unusual circumstances, however, we expect the Action Teams to improve and increase the ways they inform and involve families over the next few years. The practical problems and the research issues that have emerged from the discussions and efforts of the educators and researchers are already improving the knowledge base about school, family, and community partnerships at the high school level.

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Table 1

Trust Fund: Practices of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Starting practices and plans (1991) and *added practices (1992)* of the six high schools in this project

CHESAPEAKE (C)	FREDERICK DOUGLASS (D)*	EDGEWOOD (E)	HAVRE DE GRACE (H)	KENWOOD (K)	PATTERSON (P)
Type 1 -- Parenting					
CHAT-Chesapeake High Assistance Team					
Academic and behavioral services for students				Social services for students case management	
Evening workshops		(see Type 6 workshops led by community group)		***Family night***	
	Information about teens			***Referrals on drug abuse***	
	Parenting for teen parents			***Workshops for teen parents***	
	Grief and grieving				
			Home visits	Home visits	Home visits
			Family support -- *5-sessions*		
				Health care	
				Social services for families	Social services
Type 2 -- Communicating					
Tours and visits for middle grades students and families		***Orientation program for 8th grade students & families***	Meetings with middle grades students ***and families***	Eighth grade visits	
Summer orientation			Ninth grade orientation	Ninth grade family orientation	Summer orientations
Welcoming letters					Orientation letters
Back-to-School Night		Back-to-School Night	Back-to-School Night	Back-to-School Night	Fall orientations
Newsletters	Newsletters	Newsletters	Newsletters	Newsletters	
Phone calls		***Friendly phone calls***	Friendly phone calls	Phone calls ***Friendly phone calls***	***Phone calls***
Positive communications ***positive post cards***		***Attendance callers***	***Attendance calls***	Positive post cards	Positive communications
Attendance callers (staff)			***Pre-referral phone calls***	Attendance monitoring	Attendance policies
Attendance rewards				Student awards, recognitions	
Interim reports and pre-interim notices			Contacts about report card grades	Interim reports	***Letters about failures***
Report cards	Report cards	Report cards	Report cards	Report Cards	Report Cards
Parent-teacher conferences ***parent-teacher-student confs***	Monthly conferences with families	Parent-teacher conferences	Conference nights	***Parent-teacher conferences***	Evening meetings
Progress reports					
Special education conferences					
	Open door policy for family visits and conferences				Open door policy for family visits and conferences
Survival packets of important information	Information sheets on school programs and policies	***Magnetized "survival sheet" of important information***	***Survival packet of important information***		***Survival kit of important information***
				American Education Week visits	
	*Initial activities and plans only; project on hold in 92-93				Family-student-staff pledges

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Table 1, continued

CHESAPEAKE (C)	FREDERICK DOUGLASS (D)*	EDGEWOOD (E)	HAVRE DE GRACE (H)	KENWOOD (K)	PATTERSON (P)
Type 3 – Volunteers/Audiences					
Volunteers	Volunteers Parents helping parents	Volunteers Career and work sites	Volunteers	Alumni volunteers	Volunteers – attendance callers
Events at School/ *Assemblies*			Special events and awards and recognitions	Events at school	*Student of the month recognitions*
		Mentors (volunteers)		*Volunteers*	
Junior ring and recognition					
Undergraduate awards					
		Phone tree			
		Parent volunteer and school needs			
				Family night and dinner	
Type 4 – Learning Activities at Home					
After school study sessions					
		Course selection			Course choices & consequences
Survey on 4 period day		*10-year goal setting*		Goal setting	
		Sample interactive homework		College planning	*College visits*
		College field trip		Career planning	
		Post-high school plan night			
Type 5 – Decision making					
PTSA			PTSA	PTA	
Finance committee		Parent advisory committee	Parents on leadership teams	*School goal setting*	Parent representatives
	School Improvement Team		*Advisory committees*	Fund raising	
Multicultural committee				*Communications and hospitality committees*	
Type 6 – Collaborating with Community Groups					
		Trips to local businesses		*Alumni assembly*	
		Work experience programs			
Community workshop		Community fair			
		Business partners	Business/industry partnerships	Business/school partnerships	Business/school partnership
		Community recycling project			
		Community lead workshops		*Health organization for teens*	
	Summer service to community	*Service to the community*	Community service		
Gold card program		*Community college access to families*		Gold Card awards	
				On-site day care for infants of teens	

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